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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 003720

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DHAHRAN SENDS
PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: SAG DETAINS HARD-LINE SHI'A CLERIC RETURNING FROM
BAHRAIN

Classified by Consul General John Kincannon for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Post contacts and the Saudi Shi'a-run Rasid News Network (www.rasid.org) report that the Saudi Mubahith detained Shi'a cleric Nimr Baqir Al-Nimr on the evening of May 11 as he was entering Saudi Arabia from Bahrain over the King Fahd Causeway. Al-Nimr is from Awamiya, a small oasis town north of the town of Qatif that enjoys a reputation as a redoubt of Shi'a hardliners, greater internal volatility, and a higher concentration of private firearms. (Qatifi Shi'a sometimes, half-jokingly, call Awamiya "Falluja.") According to post contacts, Al-Nimr has a number of supporters in Awamiya, is known for "strong" views, and is considered something of a "maverick." Al-Nimr's brother, Mohammed Al-Nimr, a businessman and editor of a cultural journal, confirmed to post on May 14 that his brother was at the Mubahith detention center in Dammam. He speculated that the detention was related to one of his brother's Friday sermons or to related "cultural activities," not to what he was doing May 11 in Bahrain. Mohammed Al-Nimr expected that his brother would be released soon; if not, the family planned to appeal to the Emir. (Note: "Cultural activities" is often a euphemism for political organizing activities in the Shi'a community. We believe that clerics from the Al-Nimr family, likely including Nimr Al-Nimr, form the core of Saudi Hezbollah. End note.)

¶2. (SBU) A story in Rasid News Network claimed that there was a small "march" in Awamiya in the evening of May 13 in which "tens" of young men held signs in support of Al-Nimr and called for his release. One of post's contacts said he had heard of some sort of protests, but cautioned that they might have been nothing more than youth riding their motorcycles and honking more than usual. This same contact speculated that the Mubahith had detained Al-Nimr on the causeway rather than in Awamiya because "they fear the reaction if they tried to do anything in Awamiya."

¶3. (C) Comment: To the best of post's knowledge, Al-Nimr's detention marks the first time in at least eight months that the SAG has detained a Shi'a cleric and leader. If Al-Nimr is not released soon, his detention may prove an interesting test of the extent of support for Al-Nimr and his views in the Shi'a community and the extent to which more moderate Shi'a leaders care to support calls for his release. End comment.

(APPROVED: KINCANNON)
GFOELLER